

TESTIMONY TO APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE CONCERNING HOUSE BILL 6359

SUBMITTED BY FREDRICK W. JACKSON – FEBRUARY 21, 2013

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee

My name is Fredrick Jackson and I come before your Committee wearing several hats today: Co-Chair of the Bridgeport Alliance for Young Children, member of the Steering Committee for the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, AND I am pleased to also represent the Social Justice Committee of Connecticut's Episcopal Diocese – which has identified early childhood as one of its key advocacy areas.

My objective is to convey strong support for funding the Office of early Childhood set out in House Bill 6359 – a bold, innovative, and major step forward for Connecticut's children.

By now, the importance of early childhood is much more widely accepted today than it was seven years ago when I unexpectedly found myself as the only businessman locked up with 60 experts in early childhood charged with drafting Bridgeport's Blueprint for Young Children! I now know full well that the first five years of life set the stage for success – or failure – throughout the rest of a child's life. We also know that dollars spent in effective early care programs have a significant payback for society in terms of increased academic success, lower involvement in criminal activity, less unemployment, etc.

The \$1.7 Million proposed to establish the Office of early Childhood over two years adds only four new positions and helps fund the transition of existing staff from five State Agencies to provide a more efficient, more effective, and measurable effort in behalf of Connecticut's children. Just creating this Office is not a panacea – much work will remain to address all the challenges involved, BUT it is the building block required to begin the process of establishing a SYSTEM of care for our State's children.

I believe that the Committee also should recognize that allocation of these funds will result in a two year grant from the Graustein Memorial Fund of up to \$1 Million to support:

1. The Transition period
2. Continued Planning efforts
3. The private/Public partnership to fund the establishment of a Nonprofit entity focused upon encouraging new concepts in Early Care

Finally, I'd like to comment on the unique process that resulted in this proposal – involving the full breadth of the Early Care Community in setting out the challenges they face, the work of the Legislature in crafting 11-181, the continuing participation of the philanthropic community, the ongoing support for early childhood programs by the Governor, and the efforts of the Planner, Dr. Jones-Taylor to reach out – and listen - to all parts of the early care community while developing the Administration's proposal.